



WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

AND RESEARCH NOTES

No.	AUTHOR:	DATE
	TITLE:	
968	W. Adam Phelps, Waterfowl Research Biologist Waterfowl Hunter Preference Survey, 2008	9/17/2008

Abstract: *Waterfowl hunter surveys are an important tool used to gauge hunter satisfaction, determine ways to improve satisfaction, and help establish waterfowl season dates. In March 2008, the most recent waterfowl hunter survey was mailed to 5,000 resident waterfowl hunters over the age of 16, of which 1,938 responded. Results of this survey are presented, with discussion of important points.*

History

Waterfowl hunter surveys are an important tool used to gauge hunter satisfaction, determine ways to improve satisfaction, and help establish waterfowl season dates and structure. We last performed a waterfowl hunter survey in 2005. The next survey is likely to take place in 2011.

Methods

5,000 surveys were mailed in March 2008 to a random selection of Indiana resident HIP registrants who were over the age of 16 by 1 Sept 2007. 199 were returned as undeliverable, so 4,801 were received by hunters. 1,938 questionnaires were returned, a return rate of 40.4%. This is an improvement over 35.2% in 2005. Of these, 49 (2.4%) reported not having hunted waterfowl in the last five years, and were not used in the remaining analyses.

Comments written by respondents were entered into a spreadsheet, grouped by topic. These appear in Appendix A, along with responses to these comments.

Results

Of all waterfowl hunters (1,889 respondents):

22.5% reported hunting primarily ducks, 12.8% reported hunting primarily geese, and 64.7% reported hunting both equally. Of the last group, 56.8% reported usually hunting ducks and geese at the same time, while 43.2% reported usually hunting them during different times of the season.

Land access:

10.8% of respondents reported hunting only on public land, while 23.1% reported hunting only on private land. Overall, 76.9% of Indiana's waterfowlers use some public lands, while 89.1% use some private ground. 31.2% hunt mostly on public land and 49.9% hunt mostly on private land.

53.6% of Indiana waterfowlers that hunt on private land either own the land on which they hunt, or it is owned by friends or family. 3.8% lease land on which to hunt, and 2.7% belong to hunt clubs.

34.9% ask permission from landowners that they do not otherwise know, 1.7% gain permission to hunt on corporate-owned lands, and 0.7% hunt on private lakes.

20.4% of respondents said that finding a place to hunt is not a problem. 45.7% said that finding a place can be difficult, but they are always successful, while 20.8% said they are often unsuccessful in finding land on which to hunt. 12.9% said that land access is so difficult that it frequently prevents them from hunting, and 5 hunters (0.3% of respondents) said that land access is so difficult that it has caused them to give up hunting altogether.

A majority of respondents (55.9%) said that they sometimes ask permission to hunt on land owned by people they otherwise do not know. 23.8% said they frequently ask such permission, and 20.3% said they never do.

Motorized decoys:

67.6% of respondents reported that they have used motorized decoys at some time. However, only 55.2% reported that they currently use motorized decoys, a decrease of 12.4%.

During the most recent waterfowl season:

- 9.0% of respondents used at least one motorized decoy every time afield;
- 34.9% used them during most of their trips afield;
- 10.1% rarely used them;
- 30.6% never used motorized decoys; and
- 6.4% only used them when other hunters around them were using them.

In terms of ownership of motorized decoys, 57.4% of respondents reported that they own at least one motorized decoy [own one: 28.6%; own more than one: 13.1%; own one spinning wing decoy (SWD) plus at least one other motorized decoy: 10.9%; no SWD but another type of motorized decoy: 4.8%]. 12.7% reported owning non-motorized motion decoys, while 30.0% reported owning no motion decoys, apart from jerk strings or “motion stakes”. Together, 42.7% reported not owning any motorized decoys.

In terms of legality, 69.1% of respondents feel that motorized decoys should remain legal, while 20.5% feel that they should be illegal for ethical reasons, and 10.3% feel they should be illegal because they might cause overharvest. In detail:

- 47.7% feel that all motorized decoys should be legal;
- 23.3% feel that only SWDs should be legal, while other types should be banned;
- 2.0% feel that SWDs should be illegal, but other types should be legal;
- 20.1% feel that all motorized decoys should be banned, but not wind-powered motion decoys; and
- 6.8% feel that all motion decoys should be banned, including those operated by wind.

Overall, 52.2% support some ban of motorized decoys, although most only support a partial ban.

70.2% of respondents feel that motorized decoys are effective, and 12.5% feel that they are too effective. 17.1% think that motorized decoys are unethical, and 10.0% think that motorized decoys might be causing overharvest.

Participants were asked whether motorized decoys are more or less acceptable to them than four other methods, banned by federal regulation: baiting, live decoys, electronic callers, and high-capacity shotguns.

Baiting: 9.3% feel baiting is more acceptable than motorized decoys, 14.1% feel they are the same, and 76.6% feel that motorized decoys are more acceptable than baiting.

Live decoys: 10.8% feel that live decoys are more acceptable than motorized decoys, 11.0% feel they are the same, and 78.1% feel that motorized decoys are more acceptable than live decoys.

E-callers: 14.0% feel that e-callers are more acceptable than motorized decoys, 30.0% feel they are the same, and 55.9% feel that motorized decoys are more acceptable than e-callers.

High-cap shotguns: 19.4% feel that high-capacity shotguns are more acceptable than motorized decoys, 24.9% feel they are the same, and 55.6% feel that motorized decoys are more acceptable than high-capacity shotguns.

In terms of support for a ban on motorized decoys, 36.0% said they would support a ban on state properties; 27.6% would support a statewide ban; 27.2% would support a statewide ban while Indiana pursued a Mississippi Flyway-wide ban; 33.3% would support a Flyway-wide ban; and 38.0% would support a nationwide ban.

Survey respondent satisfaction with waterfowling in Indiana is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Satisfaction of Indiana waterfowlers with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Ducks seen	45%	26%	29%	3.21	3
# Ducks shot	35%	27%	39%	2.93	3
# Geese seen	69%	26%	15%	3.81	4
# Geese shot	37%	26%	37%	3.01	3
Duck season timing	31%	34%	35%	2.89	3
Goose season timing	39%	32%	30%	3.07	3
Duck season length	48%	31%	21%	3.32	3
Goose season length	44%	25%	31%	3.12	3
# Hunters seen	33%	49%	18%	3.15	3
Duck hunting experience	54%	28%	18%	3.45	4
Goose hunting experience	53%	28%	20%	3.40	4
Waterfowling experience	62%	25%	13%	3.64	4

¹ A score of 3 represents "neutral;" 4 represents "satisfied."

Respondents were asked to rate their experience as duck hunters and as goose hunters on a scale of 0 (no experience) to 5 (expert) (Table 2). 26.7% of respondents reported that their hunting partners had more experience than they; 13.5% reported that their partners had less experience; 54.6% reported that their partners had about the same amount of experience that they do; and 4.9% reported that they usually hunt alone. Respondents reported having hunted waterfowl 1 – 70 years (mean = 19.3; median 15). 31.8% reported traveling out of state at least every five years to hunt waterfowl, while 45.8% reported never having done so.

Table 2. Self-rated experience levels of Indiana waterfowl hunters.

	Level of Experience						Mean	Median
	0	1	2	3	4	5		
Duck	0.9	6.0	10.8	34.3	35.5	12.5	3.35	3
Goose	0.8	6.5	13.9	36.5	31.8	10.6	3.24	3

If the season can open during the Thanksgiving weekend, 35.9% prefer it to open on Wednesday, 21.3% on Thanksgiving, 25.6% on Friday, and 17.2% on Saturday. The Ohio River Zone is different, preferring to open on Friday after the holiday (29.6%, versus 20.2% on Wednesday).

Mean age of respondents was 44.5 (median = 45), and the mean age at which they began hunting waterfowl was 23.6 (median = 20). 98.1% were male. 48.2% of respondents reported that friends got them started in waterfowling, while 39.1% were introduced to the sport by family and 12.5% started on their own.

When asked whether they would prefer to return this survey via paper form or via internet, 59.0% preferred a paper survey, and 40.9% would prefer an internet survey.

Duck hunter issues (1,641 respondents):

Hunters were asked in which habitat types they primarily hunt (Table 3).

Table 3. Habitats in which duck hunters hunt, statewide and by zone (percent of respondents).

Zone	Lakes	Ponds, Marshes	All still water	Rivers	Fields
Statewide	11.5	50.2	76.3	15.8	7.9
North	13.6	55.8	83.4	9.1	7.5
South	8.8	45.5	69.0	22.8	8.3
Ohio River	11.0	31.5	64.5	29.0	6.5

Hunters were asked which split structure they would prefer for duck season (Tables 4 – 6), as well as how long they would prefer splits to be separated (Table 7).

Table 4. Split structures preferred by hunters by duck hunting zone and statewide during a liberal season (percent of respondents).

Zone	No split	2/58	3/57	7/53	9/51	14/46	14/46	51/9	53/7	57/3	58/2	Mean	Median
State	14.4	14.8	11.8	12.8	9.6	14.5	9.0	2.6	4.8	3.4	2.3	4.4 d ¹	7 days
North	15.0	11.1	11.4	11.8	3.8	12.8	13.5	3.9	7.7	5.3	3.9	5.3 d ²	9 days
South	14.3	17.6	11.7	13.0	15.0	17.6	5.3	1.1	2.4	1.2	0.8	6.1 d ³	7 days
Ohio R	11.4	27.2	11.9	15.8	14.4	11.4	3.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.5	5.3 d ⁴	3 days

¹ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (63.5% overall).

² The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (50.9% overall).

³ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (74.9% overall).

⁴ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (80.7% overall).

Table 5. Split structures preferred by hunters by duck hunting zone and statewide during a moderate season (percent of respondents).

Zone	No split	2/43	3/42	7/38	9/36	14/31	31/14	36/9	38/7	42/3	43/2	Mean	Median
State	18.8	19.7	15.9	9.0	6.9	15.9	6.8	3.0	4.8	2.8	2.6	4.1 d ¹	3 days
North	17.6	14.7	15.8	6.8	4.7	15.8	9.5	4.7	7.7	4.6	4.1	5.1 d ²	7 days
South	19.7	23.9	15.5	11.0	9.5	15.5	4.3	0.9	2.2	1.2	1.4	5.0 d ³	3 days
Ohio R	21.8	31.2	17.8	8.4	7.4	17.8	2.5	1.0	1.5	1.0	1.0	4.7 d ⁴	2 days

¹ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (67.3% overall).

² The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (57.8% overall).

³ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (75.3% overall).

⁴ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (82.7% overall).

Table 6. Split structures preferred by hunters by duck hunting zone and statewide during a restrictive season (percent of respondents).

Zone	No split	2/28	3/27	7/23	9/21	14/16	16/14	21/9	23/7	27/3	28/2	Mean	Median
State	26.3	23.3	12.6	8.5	4.3	6.3	4.4	3.1	4.3	3.5	3.3	2.7 d ¹	3 days
North	23.4	19.4	11.5	7.3	4.0	6.8	6.2	4.1	6.4	5.7	5.3	3.5 d ²	3 days
South	29.2	25.9	14.0	9.6	4.5	7.0	3.2	2.0	2.2	1.3	1.2	3.3 d ³	1 day
Ohio R.	30.5	34.4	10.8	9.4	3.5	3.9	3.5	1.5	1.0	1.0	0.05	2.7 d ⁴	1 day

¹ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (55.1% overall).

² The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (48.9% overall).

³ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (60.9% overall).

⁴ The mean early split length was calculated using only those who preferred a short early split, since that constituted a majority of respondents who wanted a split (62.1% overall).

Table 7. Preferred separation between split seasons, statewide and by zone.

Zone	No preference	One week	Two weeks	Three or more weeks	Mean ¹	Median ¹
State	30.8	16.6	30.7	21.6	2.1 weeks	Two weeks
North	26.3	20.7	37.8	14.9	1.9 weeks	Two weeks
South	34.6	11.8	25.0	28.5	2.3 weeks	Two weeks
Ohio R.	33.8	15.4	22.9	26.8	2.2 weeks	Two weeks

¹ Among those with a preference only.

In the event of a three-day split, 69.6% of hunters (statewide) prefer to hunt Friday – Sunday, with only 30.0% preferring Saturday – Monday. This pattern holds within all zones.

Regarding the current liberal bag limit of six ducks/day, 83.7% of duck hunters surveyed feel that the bag limit was about right, with 6.4% feeling it is too low and 9.6% feeling it is too high. In addition, 63.1% of respondents feel that the current liberal season (60 days) is about right, with 35.0% feeling it is too short and 1.8% feeling it is too long.

52.4% of duck hunters surveyed would support Indiana going to a 1 hen mallard/day bag limit voluntarily, even if the Flyway's bag remained at 2 hens/day.

If scaup harvest reduction is required, 80.4% of duck hunters would prefer a 1 bird bag for 60 days, while only 19.5% would prefer a 2 bird bag for a partial season.

If American black duck harvest reduction is required, 59.9% of hunters would prefer a 1 black duck OR hen mallard for a full season, and 40.0% would prefer 1 black duck for a partial season with no further restrictions on hen mallards.

76.5% of duck hunters prefer duck and goose seasons to target migration, rather than run at the same time regardless of migration.

South Zone duck hunters do not have a strong preference for the timing of the youth hunt: over half (56.4%) expressed no preference. Of those with a preference, 70.0% prefer the youth hunt to occur before the early split, rather than between the early and late splits.

Duck Zones:

67.0% of respondents would like to keep the three zones and two splits we currently have. 22.2% would prefer two zones with two splits, and only 10.7% would prefer three different zones with no

splits. If we went to three different zones, leaving the North Zone the same while enlarging the Ohio River Zone was preferred (45.6%), followed by enlarging the North Zone (40.6%), followed by enlarging both the North and Ohio River Zones (13.8%). If we opted for two new zones to keep our splits, simply adding the Ohio River Zone to the South Zone is preferred (60.1%), while combining the two southern zones while enlarging the North zone was second (39.8%). In the North Zone, enlarging the North while combining the South and Ohio River Zones was preferred (50.2%).

Duck Hunter Satisfaction:

Duck hunter satisfaction was tabulated by zone (Tables 8 – 10).

Table 8. Satisfaction of North Zone duck hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Ducks seen	43.0	26.4	30.6	3.15	3
# Ducks shot	34.0	27.8	38.3	2.92	3
Duck season timing	34.2	33.5	32.2	2.97	3
Goose season timing	38.6	31.6	29.7	3.07	3
Duck season length	52.6	27.9	19.4	3.38	4
# Hunters seen	30.2	50.4	19.4	3.10	3
Duck hunting experience	55.8	27.3	17.0	3.48	4

¹ A score of 3 represents “neutral;” 4 represents “satisfied.”

Table 9. Satisfaction of South Zone duck hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Ducks seen	50.4	24.3	25.3	3.34	4
# Ducks shot	41.5	23.4	35.1	3.08	3
Duck season timing	30.7	30.4	39.0	2.83	3
Goose season timing	38.2	31.7	38.2	3.06	3
Duck season length	47.4	28.9	23.8	3.29	3
# Hunters seen	36.6	44.8	18.7	3.20	3
Duck hunting experience	61.1	24.5	14.4	3.59	4

¹ A score of 3 represents “neutral;” 4 represents “satisfied.”

Table 10. Satisfaction of Ohio River Zone duck hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Ducks seen	48.2	26.1	25.6	3.30	3
# Ducks shot	30.8	28.3	40.9	2.89	3
Duck season timing	23.1	31.7	45.2	2.63	3
Goose season timing	33.5	30.5	36.0	2.90	3
Duck season length	48.0	25.8	26.3	3.29	3
# Hunters seen	22.5	55.1	22.5	2.98	3
Duck hunting experience	52.5	29.3	18.2	3.46	4

¹ A score of 3 represents “neutral;” 4 represents “satisfied.”

Goose Hunter Issues (n = 1465):

Hunters were asked in which habitat types they primarily hunt (Table 11).

Table 11. Habitat types in which geese are hunted, statewide and by zone.

Zone	Lakes	Ponds, Marshes	All still water	Rivers	Fields
Statewide	7.0	22.3	38.1	7.6	54.3
North	8.1	23.9	40.2	5.7	54.1
SJBP	7.5	24.6	40.7	3.0	56.3

South	5.6	20.9	35.1	10.5	54.4
Ohio River	6.2	15.4	34.6	15.4	50.0

Like duck hunters, goose hunters strongly prefer to hunt Friday – Sunday, rather than Saturday – Monday, in the event of a three-day split (70.6%).

Indiana goose hunters feel that the bag limit for Canada geese during the regular season (two/day) is too low (79.6%, versus 0.1% who feel it is too high, and 20.2% who feel it is about right).

Respondents that primarily hunted geese prefer that duck and goose seasons mirror migration, rather than run concurrently (75.6%).

Of those expressing a preference, goose hunters in the South Zone strongly prefer the youth hunt occur before the first split of the regular season, rather than between splits (68.3%).

Respondents have been hunting for 1 – 69 years (mean 15.9, median 10).

76.5% of respondents participate in the September goose season. 55.8% of goose hunters prefer the season to run 1 – 15 September (as it does currently), while 44.0% would prefer a 15-day season that opens after Labor Day weekend. Only 29.2% of respondents would give up days (take a shorter season) to allow the season to open after Labor Day but still close on 15 September.

If harvest reductions for Canada geese become necessary, 68.6% of respondents would prefer to keep long regular seasons with a 2-bird bag and give up days or birds in the bag in September. 31.2% would prefer to keep the September season intact while restricting during the regular season.

Goose hunters reported that only 7.6% participate in the Light Goose Conservation Order in most years. 33.8% are interested but have not yet hunted during this season, while 38.4% say they would be interested but have trouble finding information on snow goose hunting in Indiana. 20.3% reported no interest in hunting snow geese during spring.

Table 12. Satisfaction of North Zone goose hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Geese seen	80.1	12.9	7.0	4.10	4
# Geese shot	46.9	24.4	28.8	3.26	3
Duck season timing	31.7	36.1	32.2	2.93	3
Goose season timing	42.5	29.0	28.5	3.13	3
Goose season length	40.8	22.8	36.4	3.00	3
# Hunters seen	31.1	52.9	16.0	3.16	3
Goose hunting experience	62.4	23.8	13.8	3.61	4

¹ A score of 3 represents “neutral;” 4 represents “satisfied.”

Table 13. Satisfaction of SJBZ Zone goose hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Geese seen	77.2	14.9	7.8	4.04	4
# Geese shot	48.9	22.2	29.0	3.30	3
Duck season timing	32.4	35.9	31.7	2.94	3
Goose season timing	44.5	26.6	28.9	3.18	3
Goose season length	41.2	21.0	37.8	3.03	3
# Hunters seen	29.8	54.7	15.5	3.15	3
Goose hunting experience	59.7	27.2	13.1	3.59	4

¹ A score of 3 represents “neutral;” 4 represents “satisfied.”

Table 14. Satisfaction of South Zone goose hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Geese seen	70.1	14.5	15.4	3.81	4
# Geese shot	38.5	23.1	38.4	2.97	3
Duck season timing	24.6	35.0	40.5	2.74	3
Goose season timing	37.5	28.5	34.0	3.00	3
Goose season length	43.8	24.2	32.0	3.14	3
# Hunters seen	36.7	46.1	17.2	3.22	3
Goose hunting experience	57.6	23.4	19.0	3.49	4

¹ A score of 3 represents "neutral;" 4 represents "satisfied."

Table 15. Satisfaction of Ohio River Zone goose hunters with the 2007-08 season. Scores ranged from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied).

	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Mean ¹	Median ¹
# Geese seen	44.8	28.0	27.2	3.19	3
# Geese shot	23.4	23.4	53.2	2.58	2
Duck season timing	17.9	37.4	44.7	2.59	3
Goose season timing	27.4	37.1	35.5	2.83	3
Goose season length	37.6	28.8	33.6	3.05	3
# Hunters seen	25.6	56.0	18.4	3.08	3
Goose hunting experience	48.8	28.0	23.2	3.29	3

¹ A score of 3 represents "neutral;" 4 represents "satisfied."

Discussion and Recommendations

General Waterfowl Issues:

While 56.8% of Indiana waterfowlers hunt ducks and geese equally and at the same time, 43.2% of waterfowlers hunt ducks and geese equally but at different times. This increasing trend may represent former dedicated duck hunters branching out to take advantage of an abundant Canada goose resource. With the decoupling of duck and goose seasons, we may see this trend continue.

In terms of motorized decoys, 43.9% of respondents used at least one during most or every hunting trip, but 40.7% rarely or never used them. Despite 69% of respondents believing that motorized decoys should remain legal, there seems to be increasing discomfort with newer types of decoys on the market: 43.4% believe that motorized decoys apart from SWDs should be banned.

We asked hunters to compare their thoughts about motorized decoys to four banned methods: baiting, live decoys, electronic callers, and high-capacity shotguns. These methods have been illegal for decades. Respondents overwhelmingly felt that motorized decoys are more acceptable than any of these four methods. This raises the idea that hunters accept as unethical methods that are not acceptable when they start hunting, and have difficulty accepting new restrictions on hunting methods that were previously legal.

Statewide satisfaction of all waterfowl hunters has increased substantially since the 2005 survey: 44% satisfied and 33% dissatisfied on the 2005 survey, versus 62% satisfied and 13% dissatisfied in 2008. This is likely related to recent increases in waterfowl populations and may be related to perceived transparency and outreach in the waterfowl program, though it is not clear what the drivers are behind hunter satisfaction. In the next survey round we will likely try to clarify what affects waterfowl hunter satisfaction.

Nearly 41% of respondents indicated that they would prefer to respond to the survey via the Internet. For the next survey round (likely after the 2011 waterfowl season), we will probably offer the survey on both paper and on the Internet to try to increase response rates and reduce the substantial printing

and postage costs. There are currently some security concerns with Internet surveys, which we hope can be addressed before the next survey round.

Duck Hunter Issues:

About half of duck hunters in Indiana hunt primarily over shallow water (ponds and marshes). The proportion of duck hunters that hunt rivers increases as one moves south. One obvious interpretation is that later seasons hurt a large proportion of duck hunters, because more of them use shallow water than any other habitat type, and these are the first areas to freeze.

In a liberal season, only the Ohio River Zone had an overwhelming preference for a particular split structure (27% preferring a 2/58 split). In the South Zone, the highest preferences were for a 2/58 and 14/46 split (tied at 17.6%). Next in order was a 9/51 split, which we have had for the past few years. Since this second preference is also directly between the tied first preferences, the 9/51 split is the obvious choice to remain in place for the South Zone. For the North Zone, the first preference by a slight margin was for no split. When this is combined with a preference for at least two weeks between splits or no split at all, having no split in the North Zone is a reasonable option, especially combined with the overwhelming usage of shallow water by North Zone duck hunters. That is, since using a two week break between splits is likely to push the season late enough that most or all of the shallow water in the zone is frozen, and hunters want either at least two weeks between splits or no split at all, having a continuous season should maximize overall hunting opportunity. Under moderate and restrictive seasons, the preference for no split increases across zones.

Many states (Kentucky, Minnesota, Tennessee, Arkansas) have gone to a one hen mallard limit per day, despite the fact that the federal framework remains two hens per day. More than half of Indiana's duck hunters would support such a move in Indiana. There remains no biological reason to do so, and we will continue to recommend two hen mallards per day as long as the federal frameworks do.

This hen mallard preference may also be reflected in the preferences of Indiana hunters related to any future required reductions in American black duck harvest. About 60% of duck hunters would prefer a "hunter's choice" style bag of either one black duck or one hen mallard per day for the entire season, rather than a partial season for black ducks while the hen mallard limit remains as two per day. We believe that it is important to avoid partial seasons whenever possible. This option may be viable if we need to reduce black duck harvest, to protect Indiana hunters from accidentally shooting black ducks out of season. It remains unclear whether the Service would accept such a "hunter's choice" style bag for hen mallards and black ducks in the event that black duck harvest needed to be reduced.

In terms of the reduction in scaup harvest as promulgated by the Service this year, over 80% of Indiana duck hunters prefer a one scaup limit per day for the entire season, rather than a 2-bird partial season. This overwhelming preference, combined with the voluntary harvest reduction on hen mallards to provide a black duck in the bag for the entire season, indicates a preference among Indiana hunters for the simplest possible regulations. Duck hunting regulations are never simple, but there is a clear preference indicated here to keep them as simple as possible.

In terms of the duck zones, 67% of respondents indicated that they would prefer to keep the zones and splits that we currently have. Changing zones, which will not be possible until 2011, will result in losing either one of our zones or one of our splits. It is important that this dialogue continue over the next few years. It seems that our current zone configuration is reducing hunting opportunity for those in the northern end of the South Zone, and forces some in the southern portion of that zone to hunt a little earlier than they would prefer.

Goose Hunter Issues:

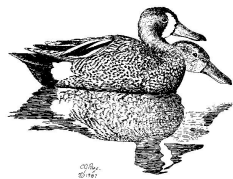
Unlike duck hunters, the majority (54.3%) of goose hunters hunt in fields. When this is combined with weather factors (the availability of urban geese to harvest late in the season), goose seasons will stay decoupled from duck seasons in order to set Canada goose seasons as late as possible.

Nearly 80% of goose hunters believe that the current bag limit for Canada geese (two/day) is too low. Unfortunately, we have no latitude at the state level to change the bag limits. Season lengths are slowly growing more liberal, and it seems likely that the bag limit in the federal frameworks will be increased in a few years.

There have been increasing conflicts between goose hunters and other lake users in September, especially during Labor Day weekend. However, Indiana goose hunters overwhelmingly prefer to keep the September goose season open from 1 – 15 September. Many goose hunters like to hunt over Labor Day weekend, and to push the season back so that it starts after the holiday would take away a day that many hunters can hunt. In addition, at this time, the federal framework for the September goose season allows no latitude in pushing the season later: To start later means giving up days, and over 70% of goose hunters oppose that idea.

Over 70% of goose hunters indicated that they are interested in participating in the light goose conservation order, but have not yet done so. Many of these indicated that it is due to difficulty in finding information about snow goose hunting in the state. We need to do a better job at disseminating information on snow goose hunting in Indiana through the Internet.

We would like to thank all of the hunters that took the time to submit their survey. These comments and opinions are important to us and are weighed (when possible) when determining regulations, and when determining the course of the waterfowl program.



These management notes are issued periodically to provide a quick source of information on wildlife surveys and investigations, and various wildlife programs prior to more terminal reports. Any information provided is subject to further analysis and therefore is not for publication without permission

Appendix A. Responses to Selected Comments Submitted on the 2008 Waterfowl Hunter Preference Survey

There is no possible way I could respond to every individual comment, so I selected comments based on frequency and interest. I grouped comments by general subject, and in many cases I grouped many comments and gave a single answer. I often paraphrased or combined similar comments into one. I also removed any comments that either were not waterfowl-related or were bigger than waterfowl. The comments appear in no particular order within each category.

This is written informally, as if it were a conversation with hunters. I hope that it is clear, without too much technical information.

Enforcement Issues

There were several comments submitted regarding conservation officers and enforcement issues. I am not qualified to address these comments, but have passed them on to appropriate personnel within the Division of Law Enforcement.

State Property Issues

There were several comments submitted regarding specific state properties or state property regulations. I am not qualified to address these comments, but have passed them on to appropriate personnel in Public Lands Management.

Habitat

There were many comments on habitat acquisition and management that were not directed at specific properties. I am not a land manager and do not feel qualified to address them. I have passed these comments on to others in the Division of Fish and Wildlife for consideration.

Motorized Decoys

I elected not to specifically respond to motorized decoy comments. There were roughly the same number of comments in favor of these devices as there were against, and they did not shed any more light than the responses to the questions in the survey did. Most of the comments were “war stories” of how they are not as effective as they used to be.

Season Timing and Length

1. Make the seasons close on a weekend.

It is very difficult or impossible to time split seasons so that they open and close on weekends; most hunters prefer that the season open on a weekend rather than close on one, given the choice.

2. Have a March split for waterfowl.

The main federal law that governs migratory bird hunting (the Migratory Bird Treaty Act) prevents seasons that occur outside of the 1 September – 28 February window. Federal regulations further restrict when seasons can occur for ducks (usually the last Saturday in September to the last Sunday in January) and geese (usually the last Saturday in September to 31 January). This is a long way of saying that there is no legal way to have a March waterfowl season.

The Light Goose Conservation Order, which does occur through March, occurs under a special set of rules that only apply because of the environmental damage caused by light geese on the Arctic breeding range.

3. Too many hunting seasons overlap.

Hunting seasons occur in the fall. In order to hunt deer, turkey, waterfowl, small game, upland game birds, webless migratory game birds, etc., some seasons are bound to overlap – there is no way to prevent it.

4. Have more youth hunts.

The USFWS gives us two additional season days for the youth hunts in each zone. While it is possible that individual properties may organize additional youth hunts, it is unlikely that we will receive yet more “free days” from USFWS for youth hunts.

Duck Seasons

5. The duck season starts/ends too early.

The early split is too long – you should add most of those days to the late season.

Subdivision ponds hold migrant ducks.

Duck migration is decreasing.

I combined all comments along these lines, though many of them were zone-specific. This is probably the most common comment I hear, especially from those in the southern part of the South Zone. I also talk with several Fish and Wildlife Area managers on a regular basis regarding the issue. When we set the seasons, we look at 25 year, ten year, and five year averages of peak migration as recorded during our weekly waterfowl inventory. **So far, there has not been a significant later shift in migration timing for ducks over these three periods.**

What I think is happening is this: Most ducks (essentially all non-mallards) migrate as they have in the past. Mallards are more adaptable than most ducks, and are more likely to stop further north than other ducks (that is, to only go as far south as they have to, to find food and open water). They are also more likely to spread out, utilizing new water on the landscape. This means retention ponds and, more importantly, flooded river bottoms. It appears that flood events in rivers are more frequent than they have been in the past due (at least partially) to an increase in paved surfaces and possibly climate change. It is my current thinking that the birds come through at the same time as they did historically, but are spread out during the earlier part of the late season. This distribution could be caused by additional water on the landscape, milder weather (not needing to feed as much), or other factors.

Hunters are always likely to see more birds flying at the end of the season and after it, no matter when the seasons fall. The birds are more active when it is colder (they need to feed more frequently), **and they are more active when they are not being shot at.** I have a quote from one of my predecessors (Tom Sporre) which I received secondhand from a FWA manager, paraphrased here: Seasons should occur when the birds are migrating, not when they are here to stay. When we have large numbers of wintering birds, they learn the lay of the land, which areas to avoid, and are harder to hunt. It's the migrants that are naïve to the landscape.

Just as importantly, over 50% of duck hunters statewide reported on this survey that they primarily hunt small bodies of still water. This is the first water to freeze, so later seasons prevent these hunters from participating for the full season, particularly those in the northern part of the South Zone. While I certainly recognize that river hunters could do very well in southern Indiana in late January, that is a very, very small percentage of the overall hunter population, and it is not fair to structure the seasons only for them.

Finally, there are many hunters who believe that the state property surveys we do weekly during migration are inadequate, that we miss most of the birds that now hold off of state properties in river bottoms, for instance. I agree that our total counts are not correct, but I do believe that they are an adequate index of when migration occurs for all species. Our total counts have declined over the past several years, but I do not believe that reflects a decline in ducks in the state—only a decline in ducks using surveyed areas. In fact, despite a decrease in duck and goose counts over the past decade or so, harvest of both has increased. We try to add areas where we can, but complete weekly (or even monthly) surveys of river systems are not possible due to the high cost of helicopter use.

We will continue to monitor the migration and analyze the data for several multi-year averages every year. Our goal is to maximize the number of ducks available to hunters, and to maximize the number of days that the most hunters can hunt. We recognize that we will not make everyone happy every year, but at least we want it to be clear what our methods are and why.

6. The duck season starts/ends too late.

Later seasons/freezeup hurt people without big rigs.

Most of this I dealt with in #5, above. We try to time the seasons so that they occur during peak migrations. I think the seasons we have now are a fair balance for most of the state, in terms of time before and after freeze. The exception to that is the northern part of the South Zone, and I am very aware of the issues regarding season timing in this area and I try to do what I can to get this area a reasonable season. Our current zone structure makes it very difficult to do.

7. I see very few birds during regular season.

Please see #5 above. Birds are more active when it is cold, and when they are not being shot at, so hunters are often more likely to see birds after the season closes.

8. The current seasons are about right.

The current split lengths are good.

I'm glad that there are a few folks out there that like the seasons. I generally only hear when hunters are unhappy, so to see positive comments is encouraging.

9. The duck season is too long.

The duck season is set based on two things: number of ponds in Canada in May (an index of habitat quality) and the number of breeding mallards in the Prairie Pothole Region and the upper Great Lakes states. We have been in a liberal season (60 days, 6 ducks/day) for many years now. When the habitat declines, and/or the number of breeding mallards decline, the seasons will get shorter. It seems pretty clear that most duck species can withstand the current 60 day seasons. As habitat changes over the next few years, we are likely to see restrictions.

There are species that may not be able to sustain the harvest brought on by a 60 day season every year, and we either already have or are working on separate regulations for them (American black duck, northern pintail, and canvasback all come immediately to mind).

10. Have a February duck season.

Indiana's seasons should go into February like Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri.

Make the duck season longer.

Most people only hunt weekends, so a 60 day season isn't many hunting days.

See #2, above. Federal law and international treaty prohibit migratory bird seasons in February. This is true in all states (the states mentioned do not have February duck seasons). There are also ethical issues with shooting northbound ducks that have already run the gauntlet south and are trying to get back to the breeding grounds, which would certainly occur in February (and is probably occurring in January) and is likely why seasons that late are prohibited.

It is possible to get special late goose seasons, as we began this year. This is only possible due to the extraordinary abundance of Canada geese in North America.

Duck seasons will never be longer than 60 days, again by federal law. There is some effort being expended to push the liberal duck season back to 50 days, but whether that will actually happen will depend a great deal on what happens with habitat (reduction in CRP and native prairie due to extraordinary corn prices) over the next few years.

Goose

*11. Make the regular Canada goose season longer.
Have Canada goose season run 15 September – 30 March.
Canada goose season should be open all year.
Have a Canada goose season in October with a 5/day limit.
The increase in residential water has hurt goose hunting.*

I have already addressed the season timing issue in #2 above (the prohibition of seasons after 31 January for geese). In addition, the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act prohibits hunting any species for more than 107 days (although regulations usually allow for fewer days than that). If we do the math, Indiana hunts 15 days in September, two days for the youth hunt, plus 74 regular season days (in most of the state), for a total of 91 days. In the 30 counties that have the Late Canada Goose Zone Season, add another 15 days for a total of 106 days. So in much of the state, we are nearly to the actual legal limit of days we can hunt geese.

While it seems that Canada goose management (one species) should be simpler than ducks (many species), it is very, very complicated. There are three subpopulations that use Indiana on a regular basis: The Mississippi Flyway Giant Population (MFGP, our local breeders), the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP, most of our Canadian migrants), and the Southern James Bay Population (SJBP). Regular goose season regulations have historically been and continue to be set largely to protect the MVP and SJBP Canadian-breeding birds. We are trying to get away from managing the individual subpopulations, but it is a slow process: each change must be monitored to ensure minimal impact before additional changes can be implemented. We added four days to the regular season length in Indiana last year, and have dissolved the SJBP zone this year. These changes must be monitored for a few years before additional changes can be made.

The gist of all this is, change is coming in goose management, but in small, measured steps so that we can make sure the entire resource is protected. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this approach, but it can try our patience.

*12. Canada goose season ends too early.
Canada goose season opens too late.*

Given that Canada goose season must end by 31 January, in most of the state it would be difficult to start it any later. Only one person thought it opens too late, a northern hunter that hunts mostly marshes. Since the vast majority of goose hunters hunt in fields, later seasons mean higher harvest, and that is what we want, when it comes to Canada geese.

*13. I like the new three split structure in the North Zone's Canada goose season.
Don't split the goose season – it is too hard to keep track.
Have duck and goose seasons at the same time.*

We were given clearance to use a three-way split for geese in 2006, and since then have used it in the North and SJBP Zones to maximize the late days available to goose hunters. The more late days, the higher harvest is likely to be, and when it comes to Canada geese, our aim is simply the highest possible harvest. Diehard goose hunters want to hunt late, and they are most likely to take the most geese. So, while it may reduce the numbers of geese shot by folks that primarily hunt ducks, it should increase the goose harvest overall.

I recognize that splits can be confusing, but those days in late December and early January up north are crucial to maximizing the number of geese that are taken.

Bag Limits

Duck

14. Lower bag limits but have longer seasons.

Bag limits and season lengths are set based on the same variables: May Canadian pond count and breeding populations of mallards in the prairies. In addition, research has established that season length (days) contributes far more to the total harvest than bag limits (because so few hunters ever approach a bag limit). So **longer seasons with lower bags increase harvest** overall, rather than keep it the same as one might think.

15. Have a total season bag limit, rather than a daily bag limit.

This is well outside what would be allowed by USFWS, and would also be completely unenforceable without huge overhead (mandatory check stations).

16. Lower duck bag to 4/day.

Increase duck bag to 8/day.

As mentioned in #14, adjusting the bag limit has less effect on harvest than the length of the season. With population levels as they are now, there is no real reason to adjust the bag limit lower, but there is also no justification to adjust it upward.

There is a great deal of attention being paid to the fact that most duck regulations (season length and bag) are set based on mallards, and there are apparently species that are adversely affected by this practice – that is, there are duck species that cannot sustain the amount of harvest that mallards can. It would not surprise me to see a reduced framework regarding bag and season length for all three season options (liberal, moderate, and restrictive) in the next few years.

17. Ban killing all hens.

Close the season on American black duck.

Close the season on hen mallards.

A 1 mallard hen limit will result in stomped birds.

Close the season on scaup.

I am very unwilling to ever have a completely closed season for any species. It is necessary on occasion to do so, but that is not true of the species listed here. Banning harvest of all hens is not biologically justifiable, and not realistically enforceable. I try my best to never shoot hens of any species, as do many other hunters, but it happens on occasion, and with no biological need, we would just be creating violations for no reason.

Mallards have the most resilience of any duck species, and can sustain the most harvest. As long as it is carefully regulated and we continue to monitor populations, there's no reason not to have hens in the bag. I don't think a one hen mallard limit would result in a great deal more wanton waste, but I also do not think it is biologically necessary at this time.

Black duck and scaup were declining (though they seem to have stabilized in the past few years), but there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that harvest played a part; that is, even if we stopped harvesting these species, they would likely still have declined, at least in the Mississippi Flyway. In addition, to think that banning harvest would stop hunting mortality on these ducks is folly. There are more canvasbacks shot in the US during a closed season than are shot in Canada during their open season, simply by mistake. Black ducks would still be shot early in the morning, mistaken for hen mallards, and scaup would continue to be shot as ring-necked ducks. Again, with no biological reason, there's no reason to create extra violations. Duck hunting is confusing enough without taking ducks out of the bag.

18. "Hunter's Choice" bag would be good in Indiana.

It sure would. For those that may be unfamiliar with this, this is an experimental bag limit that is being used in the Central Flyway in which hunters may harvest one of the following: hen mallard, black duck, pintail, or canvasback. So the first bird is always legal, but hunters have to be careful from that point on. It would be similar to the point system of years ago, except much simpler (and much less math!). The idea is to limit the harvest of the birds that are susceptible to overharvest by only allowing one of them in aggregate, rather than one pintail AND one canvasback AND one black duck. Once the experiment in the Central Flyway is over and we see what the effects are, this may become an option for Mississippi Flyway states.

19. Northern pintails are very plentiful.

American black ducks are very plentiful.

Raise the mallard limit to 5/day, one of which may be a hen.

There is some movement at the continental level to change the liberal season bag limit from 6 to 5, with all five able to be mallards (two hens). Whether that will happen is unclear. Certainly pintails and black ducks are abundant in certain areas, but not on a continental scale. Pintails seem to be doing a bit better with some habitat work that has been going on in Canada (the advent of winter wheat as nesting cover, for instance), and I would not be surprised to see an occasional two bird pintail bag in the future.

Goose

20. The limit on Canada Geese is too low during the regular season.

Yes, it probably is. However, we recently expanded the season length. We have to take cautious steps to ensure that the resource is protected with each hunting expansion. It would not surprise me to see an increase in the regular season bag, but it would also not surprise me if it took five years. See #11 for more information on the deliberate pace of Canada goose management changes.

One comment I hear a lot is that it is not worth setting up for a two bird bag limit. My response to this is always, well, there's more meat on two geese than on six ducks, but we don't complain about the six duck limit. It's a matter of perspective and I understand the frustration, but I think it's becoming more and more important to separate goose and duck hunting in hunters' minds, because goose hunting is likely to continue to expand, whereas duck hunting is unlikely to ever get more liberal than it is right now.

Special Seasons

September

21. Extend the September goose season.

Raise the bag limit during the September goose season.

Open the September Canada goose season later.

Open on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend and close on Sunday three weekends later.

Split the September season into three weekends.

Allow unplugged shotguns during the September season.

None of these is likely in the near future. The USFWS allows us to hunt 15 days, 1 – 15 September, with five birds in the bag. We cannot move the days, nor can we add to them, and no splits or zoning are allowed.

Technically we could start later, but it would cost us days.

I will begin feeling out the other states in the Flyway about trying to get the USFWS to give us a few more days of leeway regarding the September season (perhaps 15 days, closing on or before 20 September, so that we can miss Labor Day weekend without giving up days). But outright extension is unlikely. Take up February hunting!

22. Stop the September goose season.

The September season educates birds.

September is too hot and/or buggy to hunt.

Geese are inaccessible during September.

Lower the limit during the September Canada goose season.

The September goose season will never go away, as long as we have overabundant breeding populations, and we will keep the bag as high as we can. The fact is (and this always surprises people) that **Indiana shoots between 30 and 50% of our total Canada goose harvest in that 15 days in September**. Those days are crucial to keeping the goose population from growing any faster. I would like to have a bit more leeway in when and how they are structured, but as long as we're allowed a September season, we're likely to have one.

23. September geese are a non-migrating nuisance.

Research I am working on from band returns, as well as research in other states such as Michigan, shows very clearly that these birds move far more than they are given credit for: 21% of the birds banded in Indiana are shot out of state. This includes birds banded in urban locations. So while I understand that these birds can cause conflicts, to say that they are non-migratory is not correct.

24. Close FWAs to hunting in September.

Whether these special seasons are open on FWAs is a decision made by each individual property manager. I respect their decisions on these matters absolutely.

February

25. Continue February goose season.

We intend to, for at least two more seasons and hopefully indefinitely.

26. The February season is better than September.

Add the September days to the February season.

Again, we cannot move days around between seasons. We get 15 days in September, and we get 15 days in February.

27. Extend the February season.

Add more counties to February season or make it statewide.

The season cannot be expanded: 15 days is what we are allowed by federal regulations. The counties that were included in the February season were the counties selected by one of my predecessors as having goose issues when the process was started (nearly 10 years ago). Other counties have developed issues since (Lake and Porter are the biggest ones), but without starting the necessary research, monitoring, and paperwork over, we could not add these counties when we requested the late season. We will be banding geese heavily in Lake and Porter counties over the next few years in an attempt to gather more data from this area. I will likely try to add these two counties to the season when the evaluation period is over (after the 2010 season), but I don't have a good feel for whether it will be allowed. See #30 for more details about the evaluation necessary to keep this season past the three year mark.

28. The February season should be open on all public lands in open counties.

Whether these special seasons are open on FWAs and other public lands is a decision made by each individual property manager. I respect their decisions on these matters absolutely. Primarily, it may be necessary to protect breeding birds on some state properties at this time of year.

29. Checking geese during February should be discontinued.

Add more check stations.

Allow checking of geese by internet.

Open check stations on weekends.

The check stations were probably the biggest sticking point among hunters regarding the February season. In order to get this season, we had to agree to a three-year evaluation period, during which we monitor the percentage of interior (Canadian migrant) geese are in the harvest. The only way to do that is to collect the heads of adult geese. Obviously we cannot check geese via the Internet, because we need a body part. **Check stations should go away after the third year of this season (so will permits).**

We will be examining the timing and locations of check stations for the upcoming season. However, we ask hunters to bear with us with the understanding that we have staffing problems in spreading ourselves too thin across the state, and to please remember that birds will only need to be checked for the next two seasons.

30. I didn't hunt in the late season due to rules (check in, permit, etc.).

The February season was not explained well.

The February season was a colossal mess this year.

I couldn't get a permit for the late season.

The February Season was a flop.

We apologize if anyone feels that we did a poor job in getting information out there about this season. We had numerous newspaper articles around the state, and the information was available on our website. Each permittee was sent detailed information regarding the season, including why permits and checking were necessary. We will try harder to get the information out for the upcoming season.

Despite the administrative issues we had with permits getting lost or taking too long, and despite the issues with driving to check stations, the first February season was an unmitigated success. We harvested nearly 5,000 Canada geese in that time, about 2/3 of which were adults. As we are able to streamline the permit process, hopefully this year will go much more smoothly.

31. Lower the bag in February for a longer season.

The February season is too early.

Again, we get 15 days, and they must be used by 15 February. I'm not sure how much later you could possibly want a late goose season – they begin nesting in much of the state only a couple of weeks after the close of this season.

Other Goose

32. Have 15-day goose season in August.

This is an option that may be allowed for in federal regulations. Whether we will pursue it depends on how good a job the late season does at taking adults (breeding birds) out of the population. I don't want to hunt in August, and I don't think most other goose hunters do, either, but it's a possibility.

33. Set up special hunts on retention ponds, golf courses, etc., to get at urban geese.

This is a possibility that our urban wildlife biologist has been looking into. Many golf courses are outside of city limits and could be hunted safely and legally; I encourage goose hunters to seek permission from such businesses.

Light Goose Conservation Order

34. The Light Goose Conservation Order doesn't work when we have no birds!

This is clearly true. There are areas of the state (southwest Indiana is the most consistent, with birds appearing most years in north-central and northwest Indiana as well) where snow goose harvest can be good. But in most of the state, hunters will never see a snow goose. Those are the facts of life. I do believe that snow goose migration is expanding in Indiana, and more of the state may get opportunities in the relatively near future.

35. Put updated snow goose locations on the Internet.

This is something I can look into, and it seems relatively easy. However, for each location update, someone in the field has to survey, and it will likely be difficult to find the manpower to perform frequent snow goose surveys. My best advice is to phone ahead; several FWAs are most likely to have snow goose information (Hovey Lake, Minnehaha, Goose Pond, Sugar Ridge, Kankakee).

36. Add Lake and Porter counties to the Light Goose Conservation Order.

The light goose conservation order is already open statewide.

Teal

37. Add a wood duck in the bag during early teal season.

Indiana cannot have wood ducks during teal season because Indiana is a wood duck producer. Similarly, northern states cannot have teal seasons because they are teal producers. Teal hunters are encouraged to be very careful in their shot selection during teal season to ensure that they do not kill wood ducks.

38. The teal season is too early in southern Indiana.

Open teal on the Saturday after Labor Day.

Add teal days to the regular season.

Teal season is too early, especially outside of the North Zone. However, we do not have a split option for teal, so the same dates have to be used statewide. Having teal season after the September goose season opens may reduce the number of teal available for harvest, because shooting at geese may also cause teal to leave. So it is a case of having it open when we can versus open during the absolute best time. We are trying to move teal season later this year, to see if hunting geese for a few days first affects the quality of teal hunting. We cannot add teal days to the regular season because those days are only allowed for teal.

39. Teal season is great.

I'm glad you like it.

40. Close teal season.

I'm not sure what the reasoning would be to close teal season. Both species of teal are doing very well, and Indiana would shoot very few blue-winged teal if we didn't have the opportunity to hunt them in September.

Other Duck

41. Open a late Lake Michigan season.

There used to be a late Lake Michigan bonus season on scaup. With scaup declining, we are unlikely to see this option again.

State and Federal Coordination Issues

42. Canada and Mexico are too liberal, and the US overly restrictive.

Cut Canada's seasons and bag limits rather than ours.

While it is true that Canadian and Mexican bag limits are much larger than ours, the overall harvest in those countries is a small fraction of US harvest because we have so many more hunters here. Cutting seasons or bag limits in Mexico and/or Canada would do nothing for waterfowl populations on the continental scale.

43. The Feds are doing a terrible job with waterfowl, especially geese.

I don't always agree with the US Fish and Wildlife Service's positions or actions, but overall I think they do an admirable job. In regards to Canada geese, USFWS is in a tough position. We have been burned before by overharvest of the goose resource, and their primary mission (like ours) is to protect that resource. At the Mississippi Flyway level, we are working to expand Canada goose harvest, but we are expanding cautiously with a great deal of monitoring, to ensure that our actions do not cause population-level problems for the sub-Arctic and Arctic nesting subspecies that use Indiana during fall and winter. USFWS has worked with us to that end, but it is taking some time. See #11 and #21 for more information on this.

44. Monitor populations state by state, not just in Canada.

We do monitor breeding ducks in most states, and many of those (the Prairie Pothole Region and the northern Great Lakes states) are explicitly used in setting seasons. We also monitor ducks using state properties during migration, and all states participate in a large-scale survey in January. In terms of geese, we monitor breeding geese very closely in each state, and provide an estimate of the breeding population to USFWS each year. This estimate of locally-breeding geese permits us to carry out some of the special hunts we use and other

management. I am looking into possibly starting some breeding duck monitoring projects in the next few years.

45. Overbagging by southern states has hurt duck populations.

This is a matter of perspective. Many southern hunters will argue that northern states shoot all the ducks before they get there, or that northern states “short-stop” ducks with grain on the ground, keeping them from getting to southern states. Duck populations right now are doing quite well (with a few exceptions), and I think this is a “grass is always greener” situation.

46. I just want what's best for the ducks.

As waterfowl research biologist, my first responsibility is to protect the resource, and my second is to maximize the recreational opportunities that the resource provides. This comment sums up my approach, so I thank you.

47. Waterfowling in Indiana is improving.

Waterfowl opportunities in Indiana are good.

I’m glad you think so. Many folks seem to disagree. Waterfowling in Indiana faces many challenges, and we are doing our best to meet those challenges while respecting the boundaries within which we must work.

Miscellaneous

48. Good job.

Thank you. I am proud to say that I have had a great deal of support from Indiana’s waterfowl hunters, even through many disagreements. I am gratified and humbled to have their support, I sincerely hope that I earn it, and I assure you that I am working hard to keep it.

49. There are too many geese.

What we have is not a population problem, but a distribution problem; that is, we don’t have too many, they’re just in the wrong place. We are working to add hunting opportunity in and near urban areas, and we are doing work to tell us how effective management techniques such as relocating geese from cities to FWAs are.

50. Waterfowl hunting is about friends and family, not killing.

There is no such thing as a bad day hunting.

The true duck hunter will hunt no matter of season or bag.

I agree. But hunters still want to see birds when we’re in the field, and I’m working so that we do.

51. Control geese without egg destruction.

Mostly this was said in a context of asking for expanded seasons. Since we have established that we cannot expand seasons (see #11 and #21), our possibilities are limited. Nest destruction has been shown to be effective at slowing population growth, and causing failed breeders to undertake a molt migration, thus exposing themselves to more harvest pressure as they return home in September. Nest and egg destruction is a “necessary evil” that is keeping geese from getting completely out of hand. There are other options that are even less attractive.

52. I trust state and federal managers to make the best decisions.

Thank you for your trust. I think it is important to note that decisions are always made based on biology, but there are issues that have no real biological basis, for which hunter feedback is used. That is the purpose of this survey.

53. All states should share any restrictions (SWDs, bag limits, etc.).

Ideally, I agree. Waterfowl are a shared migratory resource. There are some differences that are important to note, such as the lack of a wood duck in the bag during teal season for wood duck production states, or the lack of an early teal season in teal production states.

54. Duck hunting is getting too expensive; people will quit hunting.

I will quit hunting when the federal duck stamp goes to \$25.

Duck hunters are notorious for their love of gadgets, but I think that a person can make a reasonable attempt at duck hunting without spending a fortune. It isn't the cheapest form of hunting, but there is not much that we at the state level can do about that. As for the duck stamp, there hasn't been an increase since 1990, so I think we're due. I do think that they should make the increase gradually.

55. Indiana only wants license fees, not ducks harvested.

Indiana wants a safe duck resource first and happy hunters second. I'm sorry that you feel that we only want your money, and I hope that the progress we continue to make changes your mind.

56. There is no support for hunters in southern Indiana.

I am not sure what you mean, but if you are speaking in terms of the season dates, please see #5.

Information Needs

57. Information on waterfowling in Indiana is hard to find.

I am hoping to expand the waterfowl information on the DNR web page over the course of the next year. In addition, the Mississippi Flyway has just launched a website that will have information on regulations processes and a regional view of waterfowl and other migratory birds added over the coming months (www.flyways.us). For now, keep an eye on the following website. I will try to get more information out mainly through this outlet.

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/>

58. Keep regulations and bag limits simple: they are too confusing.

Print waterfowl regulations on waterproof paper, so I can take them hunting.

There is no question that waterfowl hunting is the most daunting form of hunting, in terms of the rules and regulations that must be followed and kept straight. There are tradeoffs between simplicity and opportunity. For example, if we made the bag limit 1 duck per day, no one would have to worry about what species of duck they shot. More opportunity means more rules to keep straight. Our approach is to offer as much opportunity as possible, and trust that waterfowl hunters in Indiana are smart enough to keep them straight.

59. The duck stamp is hard to find.

I assume that this means the federal stamp, since the state stamp can be bought anywhere you buy a license. Most post offices carry the federal stamp, as do many or most sporting goods stores that sell licenses. If all else fails, the federal stamp can be ordered online at

<http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/stamps.htm>

60. Start a mentoring program for waterfowlers.

Make more training available, and more hunter education offerings.

Recruitment needs to improve.

The focus is starting to increase on recruitment and retention. Most of this effort is being led right now by the individual properties, but there is a lot of interest among management in these sorts of programs. I think we can expect to see more of this type of effort in coming years.

Regarding hunter education, this program is under the Division of Law Enforcement. I will pass the comment on with the rest of the enforcement issues.

61. Have public meetings on weekends so more can attend.

I will take this under advisement for our next round of meetings, which are likely to occur in late winter or early spring of 2009 (immediately following the upcoming season).

62. Publish goose recipes: If I knew how to cook them, I would shoot more!

This is a good idea that I will pass on to our urban wildlife biologist for possible inclusion on our website.

63. Put waterfowl identification material in the Hunting/Trapping guide.

Put ethical information in the waterfowl season brochure.

Publish the waterfowl regulations earlier.

Space is always an issue in the H/T guide and the waterfowl brochure. However, the Division of Law Enforcement has duck identification information through their online hunter education course (<http://www.in.gov/dnr/lawenfor/>). We cannot publish the waterfowl season dates any earlier than we currently do, because we don't know what they will be until mid-August.

64. Regulations for hunting public water are unclear (reservoirs, rivers, etc.).

We need clarification on rules regarding river access, especially when they flood.

Flooded land along rivers should be open to hunters if accessible by boat

For hunting regulations regarding state reservoirs, contact the office for the reservoir you wish to hunt. For other public waters, your best point of contact if you have questions regarding hunting is probably your local conservation officer.

I received several comments regarding river hunting and access to flooded bottomlands. I did not realize that it was such an issue for hunters. I will look into the regulations and see if we can get some clarification on these regulations and laws on the website.

Regulations Suggestions

65. Allow goose hunting 1/2 hour after sunset.

Allow goose hunting 1/2 hour past sunset during full moon.

This is very unlikely to happen, as shooting times are set by federal, not state, regulation. At any rate, it would likely only increase harvest briefly, as geese would quickly learn to fly 45 minutes or one hour after sunset, instead of right after sunset as they often do now.

66. Make electronic callers legal for the deaf.

This is an interesting idea; however, this regulation would have to come from the USFWS. We could not do it at the state level.

67. Allow shooting 1/2 hour before sunrise for geese.

This is already legal.

68. Open a swan season.

There are too many swans.

Swans are certainly a hot-button issue. Mute swans cause a great deal of habitat destruction, especially in northeast Indiana. It is a delicate situation, however, because a lot of folks like them. A hunting season is problematic because many hunters would find it difficult to tell mute swans from tundra or (more importantly) trumpeter swans on the wing, especially juveniles. This is an issue with which we will be dealing for many years, and I'm sure that our policies will evolve over time. However, at this time, a hunting season on mute swans seems infeasible due to identification issues.

69. Force aerators to be turned off during late season.

Make feeding of wild waterfowl illegal.

These issues are probably best addressed at the local ordinance level. There are several communities in which it is illegal to feed wild waterfowl (particularly geese). Since attracting geese is an issue that many communities deal with, you may have some success at the local level getting these issues addressed.

70. Have boat launch permits expire at the same time as hunting/fishing licenses.

I think this is a great idea and will pass it on.

71. Make it illegal to leave decoys out 24 hours a day throughout the season.

There should be a law that hunters cannot hunt within 3-400ft of another hunter.

There should be a shell limit for all waterfowl hunters.

I am in general unwilling to support statewide regulations of this nature. A shell limit would be virtually unenforceable. I have hunted in areas where distance requirements are enforced, and I can tell you that many people just won't hunt, rather than risk a violation. For the most part, I think hunters are courteous and want to do the right thing, and a conversation can resolve a lot of conflicts.

72. Shotgun capacity limits are unnecessary if there are bag limits.

Again, this is a federal regulation that is not going to change. Larger capacity shotguns seem likely to increase cripples (extra shells to shoot at ducks that are out of killing range) and skybusting.

Access Issues

73. It is hard to find private land to hunt.

All the good duck spots are leased during regular season.

Indiana needs a private lands initiative to get landowners to open land to hunting (like PLOTS in ND).

Access to hunting ground is an issue that is much bigger than just waterfowl. The options are tough due (primarily) to cost, but it is an issue that is being studied by the IDFW.

74. I will not bother private landowners to ask for access.

I encourage hunters to ask for permission to hunt on private land, and when given permission, to hunt responsibly.

75. We need more boat ramps on the Wabash.

Open a boat ramp in Delphi.

We need better public access around Patoka NWR.

I have passed these comments on to staff that deals with public access.

76. Leasing should be illegal, just like selling game is.

There should be tighter restrictions on guide services.

Leasing of hunting land is an issue that the IDFW is aware of and is watching, in terms of the limitations on access to land that it creates. However, the waterfowl program has no direct involvement with the issue.

Shot Issues

77. A lot of birds are crippled and lost due to steel shot.

Ban steel shot.

Honestly, I have not experienced this, but I have only ever hunted waterfowl with steel. There has been a great deal of research done on lethality of steel shot, and when shot properly, it is just as deadly as lead (probably not at extreme ranges). I think one of the biggest issues is that a lot of hunters shoot clays or otherwise practice with lead, and have problems with steel in the field because it shoots a little differently. I try to practice with steel, and I suggest doing so to people that have trouble with steel shot.

78. Lead shot should be legal for field hunting.

This is simply not going to happen. Lead is a poison. There is a great deal of momentum nationwide heading toward further restrictions of lead shot. It affects not only waterfowl, but upland game birds, songbirds, and other wildlife, as well as water quality.

Zones

79. Move the North Zone line south.

Move the Ohio River Zone line north to include the White River Basin.

Leave the Ohio River Zone as is.

Move the North Zone line north.

The South Zone needs to be bigger.

Get rid of the Ohio River Zone.

Duck zones can only be changed every five years; Indiana is next eligible to change zones in 2011. Current federal regulations state that changes to the zones would force us to go from three zones with two split seasons to either 1) two zones with two splits or 2) three zones with no splits. Most respondents to the survey want to keep the zones as they are. We will continue to discuss the possibility of changing zones without losing our current zone/split flexibility with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. If we were able to change zones, the most likely changes would involve making the South Zone smaller and the North and Ohio River Zones larger. Exactly how that would look is not clear, but hunters in the north end of the South Zone consistently have a short duck season due to freeze-up.

80. Do away with zones and sell two different licenses: one for Oct. 15 – Dec. 15, and one for Nov. 1 – Dec. 31.

While this is an interesting idea, this is well outside what would be allowed by USFWS.

Survey

81. I liked the survey.

Add "no preference" to more questions.

Staple surveys on the left side next time.

The survey had some vague questions.

Thanks to everyone that submitted comments to make the survey better. I will keep them in mind for the next survey.

82. The survey was too long.

There were many issues to address in waterfowl this time around. Hopefully the surveys will get shorter and shorter over time as we get a good handle on opinions and can stop asking the same questions on every survey.

83. DNR surveys are a waste of time.

I sincerely hope this isn't the case. I get a great deal of insight into opinions that matter very much regarding waterfowl regulations.

84. I hope that comments will be read/have impact.

Will I respond to comments?

I would like the results of this survey released.

I try very hard to provide as much transparency in the waterfowl program as is possible. We will always release the results of surveys, and I will always try to respond to as many comments as is practical, though I cannot possibly do so personally to each respondent with comments.

85. *Do the survey over the internet to save the state money.*

A majority of respondents indicated that they would rather do the survey on paper. However, next time around (probably 2010 or 2011), we will likely offer the survey in both formats. The savings in postage could be quite substantial.